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THE DIGNITY OF GOODNESS.

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

MR. ICHABOD PEASE,

(A MAN OF COLOR,)

IN ST. JAMES' CHURCH, NEW-LONDON,

MARCH 5th, 1842.

BY REV. ROBERT A. HALLAM, RECTOR.

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SERMON.

PROVERBS, 12: 26.

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor.

I should do injustice to my own feelings, and I may reasonably presume, to yours also, if I were to suffer this occasion to pass without bearing testimony to the worth of the venerable man, whose remains we are about to commit to the grave. We, doubtless, all feel, that this was a *remarkable* man; the more remarkable, because his distinction was of an uncommon sort, and lay purely in eminence of goodness. Seldom, indeed, may the language of unmingled eulogy be so safely and fittingly spoken. Here we see, how much mere goodness can do to make a man respectable, and have a proof and illustration of the dignity of virtue, and of the power of Christianity to exalt, ennoble and beautify the human character. Yes, here naked goodness, without the adventitious aids of wealth, rank, learning, distinguished talents, or brilliant deeds, shines in its own simple majesty

and loveliness, and secures the regard and homage of all hearts. Our venerated friend had but a *single* claim to the respect of his fellows ; but that was better than all others, distanced them all, and more than supplied the want of them all. It was all-sufficient, entirely successful, perfectly irresistible. All who beheld him, knew that they looked upon a good man, and felt “how awful goodness is,” and bowed before it with involuntary reverence. He *sought* no praise, he *courted* no attentions. He walked quietly in his own appointed sphere, with a modest unconsciousness of his own superiority, intent only on being faithful, and “doing his duty in that state of life into which it had pleased God to call him.” Reverence came to him unasked and unsought—a spontaneous tribute, which men rendered simply because they had no power to withhold it, and *therefore* it did him no harm. If he had seemed desirous or vain of it, it would have quickly vanished ; the ground on which it rested would have been withdrawn ; for, “for men to *search* their own glory is *not* glory”—the seeking of the thing is the forfeiture of it. But humility and singleness of mind, “simplicity and godly sincerity” win for themselves that which they seek *not*, and scarcely perceive or appreciate when it comes. The distinction to which this good man attained in this community thus undesignedly and almost unknowingly, presented a very striking contrast to the eminence of any *others*

who held high place in it, or were objects of admiration, esteem and envy. It was of a purer quality ; and surely I do not err in saying, of altogether a more precious and enviable sort. I do not say, that earthly-minded men would be willing to give their pomp and splendor in exchange for it ; but I may say, that in their inmost hearts, they knew and felt it to be intrinsically better and a higher kind of greatness. Oh ! what to this unbought, true, heartfelt veneration, are all the applauses and honors that wait upon high condition, the wonderment of “stupid starers,” and the adulation of calculating sycophants ! What to this *full* tribute, is the partial, qualified praise we mete out to ordinary specimens of goodness, deformed as they are by some wretched “superfluity of naughtiness,” or sullied by some miserable defect or meanness—“a dead fly in the ointment of the apothecary !” How much before them all in the unavoidable judgment of all men, is the beauty, dignity and value of a well spent life, the plan of which is thoroughly carried out, and the parts of which match ; even though it be spent in the humblest walks and works of life, as it stands complete in the symmetry of just proportions and the polish of perfect workmanship.

I have spoken of the *beauty* as well as the respectability of goodness. You will at once takè my meaning, as referring in part, at least, to that *grace*, which it throws over the outward walk and

manners—"the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" which it puts upon the character; and you, who remember how our good old friend was wont to deport himself, and who know how in *him* the outward mien was the simple fruit and expression of the inward sentiment, will at once admit, how a quick sense of what was due to all men, and a willingness and desire to render it, coupled with a spirit of humility self-respect and kindness, gave him that true politeness, which is equally removed from forwardness and servility, and made him, in the best sense, a christian gentleman. The righteous is indeed then "more excellent than his neighbor," yea, more excellent than any of his neighbors, as he possesses an excellence of a more precious and exalted kind, one which extorts the suffrages and testimonies of all beholders. Now I say, that it is good for this community that such an instance has been in it; that we have seen what goodness can do, not in theory, but in fact, for man; how, separated from all factitious adornments and recommendations, it can elevate our nature, and set its possessor among princes. I say, it is a salutary lesson—I pray it may be an effectual and a lasting one; and if by any thing I may say, I may help to fasten and enstamp it upon your minds, I shall be honored as a "worker together with him" who is gone, standing as an interpreter to convey to you the useful doctrine, which "he being dead," by me "yet speaketh."

If it be asked, *why* there is this power in goodness to command the reverence of men ? We answer, that it lies down among the deep seated principles of our moral constitution, in that “law of our mind,” against which “the law of our members” may war, but which it can never conquer. That instinctive perception which all men have, of moral distinctions, which forces them to approve the ways of virtue and holiness, however little they may feel inclined to follow them, begets a necessary respect for all, in whom “the fruit of good living” is consistently exhibited. There is an intrinsic worth and venerableness in righteousness, which the spirit of man is so constituted as to perceive and honor, and therefore it is not optional with him, whether he will treat it with respect or not. He is impelled to do it by an inward impulse, which he cannot overcome ; which, though he may stifle it for a time, is sure to have the mastery of him in the end. We have certain inward faculties of perception, by which we discern spiritual qualities and their differences ; and which are no more to be reasoned out of their judgments, than the bodily senses out of *their* judgments of form, size, color and taste. Thus goodness has an inalienable title to our approval and regard, with power to vindicate it, though it be by no other force but by the irresistible appeal—the moral compulsion of its own native worthiness. “The evil bow before the good ;” for God, in the very

structure of the human soul, endowed the former with a claim to reverence, and laid the latter under the necessity of yielding it.

We should do utter injustice to the truth, however, if we left you longer in the dark as to what we *mean* by goodness. We have been speaking all along of *religious* goodness, of that virtue which is based upon the fear and love of God, and which is animated and sustained by "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." Goodness was not more truly the secret of our venerable friend's respectability, than was his piety the secret of his goodness. He "believed in the Lord with all his heart," and served him with a willing and constant mind. All that was excellent on the surface of his character and life, was the flowering and fruitage of this seed. This "made him to differ;" and the strength and perfectness of this made him eminent. This was just as evident to them who had intimacy of communication with him, as was his moral superiority to common observers. He would have thought that man who should have suggested to him his own worth as a ground of complacency and hope, instead of an exclusive dependence on the merits of Christ, his worst enemy. He thought not of the worthiness of his works, nor counted that he "had already attained;" but "this one thing he did, forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth unto those things which were before, he pressed towards the mark for the

prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It were hard to find one who more looked upon things that were not seen, to whom they were more real and more familiar, who more lived by them and for them. He loved the sanctuary, and came there to pray as well as hear; and nothing but infirmity ever kept him away when so many as "two or three were gathered together" there. He loved the church and her ways. The words of her liturgy were to him as household words, and were as manna to his mouth; and not more truly than his, did Eli's "heart tremble for the ark," or David's rejoice to do it honor. Religion was indeed the soul of his life, the spring and regulator of all his conduct. Whatsoever he did, he "did it heartily, as to the Lord, and not to man." He understood not that mistaken refinement by which men seek to distinguish between their common acts and their religious doings. *All his doings* were religious, for all were done in faith and for God. And thus it was that he "did justly and loved mercy"—because he "walked humbly with his God." It is well that the world should understand what the tree was, whose fruits they have been fain to admire. No worldly morality yielded them; they were the fruit of a believing, renewed and obedient mind. I have said these things boldly, because I am sure of having in every person a witness to bear me out, and a fuller testimony from each one in proportion to his opportunity of knowing.

ICHABOD PEASE was born in slavery, and grew up amidst the trials and disadvantages of that miserable system. It pleased God to provide him with an important alleviation of its evils, in a kind and pious mistress, who felt deeply and labored faithfully to discharge the obligation of "bringing him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." She taught him the catechism of her church, and the principal truths of the Bible, required him to attend public worship, and labored to imbue his mind with "all those things which a christian ought to know and believe, to his soul's health." To her faithful endeavors he always felt himself greatly indebted ; and never, to his dying day, ceased to speak of her with the deepest respect, affection and gratitude. It is pleasant thus to find the foundation of his subsequent excellence laid in early religious training, and to see in him another testimony to the value and efficiency of female co-operation in the work of God. He grew up with virtuous habits, and with such a sense of religion as at least served to protect him against the temptations incident to his condition. But in early manhood his religious views assumed a deeper, clearer and firmer stamp. Bishop Seabury who was then the rector of this church, manifested a lively interest in him at that time, and became his instructor and comforter ; nor did he ever cease to be his friend and counsellor till his ministry here ended with his life. For the memory of that dis-

tinguished man, he never ceased to cherish the most profound and affectionate veneration. At that time he devoted himself to God's service at this altar. How well he kept this vow, you among whom he has lived and acted for the more than sixty years which have elapsed since, walking before you in the beauty of his quiet, patient, faithful, modest, diligent, benevolent and holy life, know full well. "By patient continuance in well doing, he sought for glory, honor and immortality." The proper sequel of such a life, was a tranquil and peaceful death. And it was in keeping with it all, that it should end as it did ; and be hastened to its termination by acts of kindness and philanthropy. When reminded at the last that his end was near, he simply said, "I am ready ;" and then without a struggle, fell asleep, and was joined to the great congregation of "the spirits of just men."*

The case we have now been looking at is full of useful instruction. How does it commend to us all, goodness ; and piety as the source of goodness ; and the domestic instruction of the young, as the best and firmest foundation of piety, and of the goodness and respectability which are its offspring. How too, does it serve to correct our estimate of human life, and what is good for man in it ; to stamp vanity upon the petty distinctions of cast and grade, and all the diversities of rank

*See Appendix.

which grow out of the artificial structure of society ; and exalt in our eyes a nobility of God's creating, better and more honorable than all earthly greatness, from which, men have no power to debar their fellows by any decree of caprice, fashion or prejudice ; which is as free to the humblest as to the highest ; which he who has, may afford to despise the phantom show and glory that passeth away ; which heeds no bar of complexion, birth or property ; in which " there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free." Oh ! brethren, how cheap and frivolous look the transitory glory and greatness of the world, along side of this true riches and honor, which he who has, may patiently and cheerfully bear disadvantage of position, and he who has not, is but a poor man and a mean man, whatever he or others may think of it.

The people of color will permit me to say, how truly I feel for them in their great loss ; their loss of a friend, a guide, a counsellor, an example. Oh ! let his memory be embalmed in their hearts. But let them not think they have done him honor enough when they have grieved for him and resolved to remember him. There is a better way to honor him ; a way which would have been much more pleasing to him. Let them resolve to be like him ; to do as he did. He has shown them much the best and most effectual way of relieving themselves from the evils of their lot. They, and

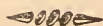
others for them, may not be able so soon as they could wish, to repair the mischiefs and wrongs of centuries. But this honored man has shown them how to be honorable and happy in spite of their disadvantages. It is clear from his case, that one of them may have as much of the respect and love of this community as any man in it. *He* earned it by being a good man, a faithful man, an exemplary man, a disciple and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. So may they. One who, if he knows his own heart, is as truly their friend as any other, and who counts it an honor to have been the pastor of one of their number, would, over his sleeping remains, earnestly and affectionately advise them to adopt his principles, and follow his example. Let them fix this in their minds, that *he* was a christian; and a christian not half-way, but with all his heart. This was the reason of his goodness and respectability. Up then, brethren, and be doing. Waste not your time in idle despondency and useless complaints. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Renounce your sins. Perform your duty. "By patient continuance in well-doing, seek for honor," and God will give you your reward.

The communicants of this congregation must feel that they too have sustained a loss, by the removal of one who was an honor and an ornament to them in the eyes of men, whose fidelity was wont to animate their zeal and reprove their faults.

They will feel his absence when they come around this altar to receive the emblems of their Master's body and blood : where, as he used to kneel, he reminded them so touchingly of that saying of the Master, "The last shall be first." They will hardly fail to remember him, when here they "bless God's holy name for all his servants departed this life in his faith and fear, and beseech him to give them grace so to follow their good examples, that with them, they may be partakers of his heavenly kingdom." His life and his death solemnly admonish them to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know that their labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Finally, my brethren, be all warned and admonished not to spend your strength and your time in the pursuit of trifles and shadows, but seek for a real, substantial, abiding good. Every thing is empty, delusive and transient but those moral and spiritual treasures, which survive death, and fit man for everlasting glory. Oh ! in your hearts ye know it and confess it. Act then according to your knowledge. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." "For the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

APPENDIX.



The statements in the text were made hastily, from loose recollections of conversations with the deceased, without opportunity to verify them by tasking the memory or making inquiries. Subsequent reflection has satisfied the author that they are somewhat inaccurate. The following sketch will show in what respects, and perhaps prove interesting to the reader.

ICHABOD PEASE was born 10th September, 1755, on Fisher's Island in the family of James Mumford, who was the owner of his parents. He was given by Mr. Mumford to his son, Robinson, and grew up in his family. Robinson Mumford's wife was the kind and pious mistress spoken of in the discourse. When the Revolutionary War broke out, Ichabod had just attained manhood, and soon after married Rose, servant of Capt. Robert Frowd, to whom report has given sufficient praise, in saying that she was "a help *meet* for him." Mr. Mumford espoused the royal cause, and at an early period of the war, went to North Carolina on horseback, taking Ichabod with him as his attendant. He subsequently concluded to remove his family to the South. This was a sore grief to Ichabod, as it would separate him from his wife, and as the sight he had had of Southern slavery had produced no liking for it. He earnestly requested his master to set him at liberty, and Mr. Mumford with a view to appease him, flattered him with the prospect of freedom on his arrival in the South. Friendly information led him soon to distrust his master's intentions; and he resolved to obtain his freedom by running away. There being a vessel in the harbor then ready for sea, he shipped on board of her as a hand. She sailed, but encountered a storm and was forced to return to port. The master and crew professed to be his friends, and promised to aid in concealing him. With their help he came ashore secretly several times and visited his wife. But learning that

the mate had betrayed him to Mr. Mumford, and formed a plan to deliver him up, he deserted the vessel and secreted himself on shore. Here he was protected by his friends, and supported himself by making shoes, having previously learned the trade. After various difficulties, Mr. Mumford's removal from the place brought him relief and he now considered his liberty as secured. But he was destined to a sad disappointment. He was taken for a debt of his master's, and became the property of John Deshon. By him, after having served him a few years, he was set free ; but he continued of choice in the family of his former master till Mr. Deshon's decease, whose descendants always cherished a strong regard for him, and followed him to the grave, with unfeigned respect and sorrow. His wife died young, and left no children ; and he did not marry again. Many years of his life, he spent in the employ of the late Gen. Jedediah Huntington, whom he was thought not a little to resemble in manners and character, and the cultivation of whose garden and grounds was his employment and pleasure. This continued to be the scene of his pleasant labors after the General's death, under several successive owners, who looked upon him as not the least among the ornaments of the place, till age disabled him.

The worship of the Episcopal Church was discontinued during the Revolutionary War. Bishop Seabury came here in 1785. Mr. Pease soon after became a communicant. His mind was impressed, it was said, by a discourse of Rev. Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Patten. He lived on with the good will and respect of "all sorts and conditions of men," to a good old age, and fell asleep March 3, 1842, aged 86.

Such as did not know the man, may think the tone of this eulogy extravagant ; none will, who did : for as, while he lived, all felt that "the righteous was more excellent than his neighbor," so now all know, that „ the memory of the just is blessed."





WERT
BOOKBINDING
Grantville, Pa
Jan Feb 1989
We're all in the house

